

## From Allegiance to Conquest: Terminology, Meanings, Myths

In the following pages I will focus on deciphering various meanings of the notions of “submission” and “conquest,” often understood here in a narrow and restricted sense. This analysis relies on a great variety of information provided by Ottoman narratives and documentary sources, but also others, produced in the Byzantine Empire, the Danubian principalities, Transylvania and Western Europe.

### 1 Acknowledgement of Allegiance

#### 1.1 Terminology

Simple or phrasal verbs from Ottoman chronicles and documents, such as *boyun eğmek*, *boyun vermek*, *tapmak*, *ita'at ve inkiyad etmek*, *yüz sürümek*, or *yüz sürmek*, have both concrete and abstract meanings. They can be translated with a figurative meaning, such as “to obey,” “to submit,” “to pay homage,” “to reverence,” “to acknowledge allegiance,” or, with a proper signification, as “to bend,” “to hang one’s head down,” “to make a low bow.” In this regard, one must take into account the use of nouns, both concrete – like “head,” “neck” (*baş*, *boyun*), – and abstract terms, like “submission,” “obedience,” “allegiance” (*ita'at*, *inkiyad*, *muti*, *münkad*) in the structure of such phrasal expressions.

Worth mentioning here is the abundant, albeit diffuse, descriptive use of ceremonies at the sultan’s court (including the reception of tributary princes, envoys, and Ottoman dignitaries), in Ottoman phrases such as “to rub one’s face,” “to pay one’s humble respect or homages to a superior,” “to prostrate oneself,” “to bow,” “to humbly kowtow,” or to denote the acknowledgment of submission. For instance, the terminology employed in the 1480–1481 *ahdname* suggests that the conclusion of peace with Mehmed II demanded Stephen the Great to “rub his face against the land of servitude” (*zemin-i hizmete yüz sürüyüb*). Also, Sa’adeddin used the verb *yüz sürmek* to describe the ceremony when the sultan received Anatolian and Rumelian *beylerbeyis*, as well as the envoy of the Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus: “the Hungarian envoy, coming as well, rubbed his face against the Court-shelter of the world.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, Mehmed

1 *Ungurus kıralın dahi elçisi gelüb Dergah-ı Cihanpenaha yüz sürdü* (Sa’adedin, *Tevarih*, in Decei, “Sulhame,” 125, n. 6).

Neşri, in his description of Mehmed II's Wallachian campaign in 1462 and the subsequent submission of the Wallachian boyards, opted for the verb *tapmak*, which means "to bend," "to hang one's head down," "to make low bows," but also "to meet someone."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the Ottoman chancery developed its own vocabulary meant to define the relationship with tributary princes. This included: *sadakat ü-istikamet*, two synonyms that can be translated as "faithfulness and loyalty" or "fidelity and devotion"; *ubudiyet ü-ita'at*, *ubudiyet ü-rukkiyet*, *ita'at ü-inkyad*, meaning "obedience and submission," "obeisance and servitude," "homage paying," or "acknowledgment of allegiance."<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, it is difficult to precisely define the legal meanings of these terms, as they were abundantly employed in both *ahdnames* granted to Western states like Venice, England, or Poland,<sup>4</sup> and documents regarding tribute-payer princes. Thus, before 1475, Stephen the Great, was – according to the 1476 *feti-hname* – in:

a state of obeisance and of tribute-payer condition and of real submission and servitude towards my Imperial Threshold.<sup>5</sup>

In a similar vein, in 1641 George Rákoczy I sent a "letter of submission" (translated in Turkish as *ubudiyetname*) to Sultan Ibrahim (1640–1648), promising to deliver the tribute due to the Porte in his quality of *haracgüzar*.<sup>6</sup>

The Greek word *proskynesis* was invariably translated by Byzantinists as "bowing," "prostrating," or "adoring" encountered in fifteenth-century Byzantine chronicles along with similar expressions, like "to bow one's head," "to bend."<sup>7</sup> From this vocabulary emerged the Romanian term *închinare* abundantly employed in the Wallachian and Moldavian sources.<sup>8</sup>

2 Neşri, *Tarih*, ed. Unat, Köymen, II, 757.

3 *Redhouse*, 540, 564, 804, 823, 1095, 1267; Decei, "Sulhame," 122; Gemil, *Documente turceşti*, 42, 209, 304; Veliman, *Documente turceşti*, doc. 1, 73, 164, 437.

4 In 1540 *ahdname* to Venice, "request of submission" (*arz-ı ubudiyet*) (Gökbilgin, "Belgeler I," 121).

5 *Atebe-i aliyeme şol ki resm-i ita'at ve haracgüzari ve mahz-ı ubudiyet ü hizmetkari der-i müeddi kılurken* (Gemil, "Fetih-name," 254, 257).

6 Gemil, *Documente turceşti*, doc. 106. In October 1613, Radu Mihnea, Ştefan II Tomşa and Gabriel Bethlen were sworn in submission to the serdar Iskender paşa, as "tributaries" (*haracgüzarlar*) (Decei, *Imp. otoman*, 370).

7 *Proskyno* means "to prostrate" (M. A. Bailly, *Dictionnaire grec-français*, Paris: Hachette, 1894, 1670; Ducas, *Istoria*, 262–3, 429, 430, 435).

8 See *Letopiseşul cantacuzinesc*, passim; Miron Costin, *Letopiseş*, passim; Nicolae Costin, *Letopiseş*, passim; Berza, "Turcs, Empire Ottoman et relations roumano-turques," 595–627.